

# Itchy Skin in Children: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment



## Highlights

Itchy skin (pruritus) in children may appear normal or have a rash.

Common causes of itchy skin include eczema, psoriasis, allergic reactions, burns, infections, and certain medical conditions.

Treatment may involve emollients (moisturisers), corticosteroid creams, or antihistamines.

Prevent itchy skin by applying moisturiser daily, wearing loose cotton clothing, taking lukewarm, short showers, and avoiding overheating.

Severe itching can cause skin infections, disturb sleep, and cause distress.

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## **What is itchy skin?**

Itchy skin, or pruritus, is common in children and can be uncomfortable. It is usually a symptom of skin disorders, infections, or other conditions. The skin may appear normal or may have a rash.

## **What are symptoms of itchy skin?**

If your child has itchy skin, they may also experience:

- Rash (mild or severe)
- Dry or bumpy skin
- Discomfort or burning sensations
- Worsening itchiness at night
- Itching in specific parts of the body or all over

Children may scratch to relieve itching, leading to skin damage, known as the "itch-scratch-itch" cycle, which can make the skin thicker, scaly, and red.

## **What causes itchy skin?**

Itchy skin is often caused by skin conditions or infections, but may also result from allergic reactions, burns, some medicines, or medical conditions.

Common skin conditions that cause itchy skin in children:

- Atopic dermatitis (eczema)
- Contact dermatitis
- Hives (urticaria)

Infections that cause itchy skin:

- Bacterial infections (e.g., impetigo)
- Viral infections (e.g., chickenpox)
- Parasitic infections (e.g., scabies)

Fungal infections \ (e.g., tinea\)

Other causes of itchy skin:

Burns \ (scalds, sunburns\)

Allergic reactions

Insect bites

Some medications

Certain medical conditions

### **When should I see my doctor?**

Consult your doctor if your child has itchy skin and experiences any of the following:

Sudden onset of itching

Distress or impact on quality of life

Signs of infection \ (red or warm skin\)

Fever and rash

In case of a serious allergic reaction, such as difficulty breathing or swelling of the face, lips, or tongue, call for emergency help and follow the allergy action plan if available.

### **How is itchy skin diagnosed?**

To diagnose itchy skin, a doctor may:

Examine the skin and ask about symptoms and medical history

Take a swab if an infection or infestation is suspected

Recommend blood, urine, or stool tests if a general health problem is suspected

### **How is itchy skin treated?**

Treatment options may include:

Creams: Moisturisers, steroid creams, or ointments

Oral medications: Antihistamines or other medications

Pharmacists can recommend fragrance-free, dye-free, and preservative-free moisturisers.

## **Can itchy skin be prevented?**

Preventing itchy skin depends on its cause. Tips to prevent itching include:

Moisturise with recommended emollients

Avoid soaps, bubble baths, and shower gels that dry out the skin

Take short, lukewarm showers

Wear loose cotton clothing

Avoid overheating

Keep fingernails short to reduce damage from scratching

Protect from sunburn \(\(Be SunSmart\)\)

If the itch is caused by a specific condition, treating that condition can help prevent itching.

## **Tips to break the itch-scratch-itch cycle**

Deep breathing, relaxation techniques

Distraction \(\(playing a game, massage\)\)

Apply a soft, cool, and wet towel to the itchy area

Pat or pinch the itchy skin instead of scratching

## **Complications of itchy skin**

Frequent scratching can lead to sores that may become infected. Itchy skin can also affect your child's sleep, mood, school performance, and social interactions.

## **Tools And Assistance**

For more information on managing itchy skin and its treatment, consult healthcare professionals or visit trusted health resources.